

## **We Are All Human: A Collective Creation**

*By Jillian Andresen and Amber Warner—May 2015*

Professor Luis A. Ramos-Garcia couldn't have stated it better: "with theater, we can recover our memory and find the true story." Participating in the Latin American Theatre workshop was an experience that has taught us exactly that: the creation of a play based on our own "collective memory" showed us just how theater can unite a group of people and shed light on issues that affect us all. Our entire class participated in creating an original play that talked about moments in our lives which have affected the ways in which we think about and relate to gender and gender expectations. It was truly incredible to work with such a personal yet universal theme—each person could see themselves in the stories presented by others. All of the opportunities given to us by our professor, Dr. Nelsy Echávez-Solano—the theatre workshop itself, the presentation of our own play, the visits of the mothers of Soacha and the victims of the violence in Colombia, and the presentation of their play *Antígonas: Tribunal de Mujeres*—have demonstrated theatre's unique role in facilitating the process of remembering and sharing what is happening in the world and our own lives.

The opportunity to participate in a theater workshop with Colombian playwright, director, and poet Carlos Satizábal, was unique and transformative. Our work with him started with an invitation to share our personal experiences related to the theme of gender. We worked together to incorporate all of our stories and represent them in a few simple words (haiku style) and actions. It was entertaining to keep practicing and seeing things change each day. Before undergoing this process, our classmates were just that--classmates. However, in sharing our stories and permitting ourselves to feel vulnerable, the environment in the class shifted. We grew closer, became friends, and even sometimes referred to ourselves as a theatre "family".

On the day of the presentation of our piece, we were all very nervous. We each had an individual role, and ended the play with everyone singing a song and stating "somos humanos," or "we are all human." The audience was full of students and faculty, as well as professors from the University of Minnesota and the women from Colombia. We received a huge applause when we finished and felt proud of what we had accomplished. The rest of the night was emotional; the mothers and victims of the conflicts in Columbia—fueled as much by U.S. intervention as by internal corruption—spoke of the tragic situation in their country and how it has affected their lives personally and, consequently, lead to the creation of their play *Antígonas: Tribunal de Mujeres*. They are incredible women; although each presentation and interview made the thought of having lost a child, friend, spouse, or other loved one fresh, they continue to share their painful stories, calling attention to and speaking out against the injustices in Colombia.

For these women, the play serves as a way to heal and give meaning to their experiences and create a sense of solidarity between all victims of human rights violations, and furthermore, all of humanity. It also acts as a message demanding that governments admit their guilt and for people everywhere to know the truth about Colombia. Most importantly, it proclaims that in learning the truth of the past we can hope to prevent these

horrors from happening in the future: “nunca jamás,” or “never again.” Despite their suffering, these powerful women continue performing, continue singing, and continue living. Their story has an impact on all those who hear it—everyone can find something to connect to, no explanations needed. In this way, theater creates a consciousness between people surrounding a problem they find important, whether it be gender, as in our play, or the injustices that exist in the world. This is a profound notion that has affected us deeply.

This touching experience was made possible through participation in our “Latin American Theater course” (HISP 355: Latin American Literature and Culture through Theater). We truly could not have asked for a better class to wrap up our final semester here at CSB/SJU.